

Representative Raul Ruiz (CA-25)
Member Day Testimony
House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee
April 18, 2023

Thank you, Chair Graves and Ranking Member Larsen, for holding today's Member Day hearing. I appreciate the opportunity to highlight the City of Banning's desire to close the Banning Municipal Airport, which I would like to see the Committee address through the FAA reauthorization bill this year.

Over the last several years, the airport has operated with an annual deficit, meaning residents of this disadvantaged community are using their tax dollars to subsidize airport operations, maintenance, and repairs. The airport is currently home to only 29 based aircraft, with the overwhelming majority of those owned by non-residents of the city. Despite efforts to attract and retain a fixed-based operator to make the airport an attractive alternative to surrounding airports, the airport has been operating without one for several years. Furthermore, there are general aviation airports within a 30 minute flight time of the Banning Municipal Airport that would benefit from the closure of the airport due to the relocation of aircraft, increased operations, and reduced demand on federal funding.

In 2016, the City of Banning commissioned an Airport Feasibility Study to analyze the future of the Banning Municipal Airport and determine the best use of the airport property. The study confirmed that the airport had created a financial burden for the city. Instead of maintaining the airport, the study found that the airport property is ideally suited for logistics, e-commerce, and light manufacturing industries.

Recognizing the economic realities of the Banning Municipal Airport, in 2017, the Banning City Council overwhelmingly passed a resolution "declaring that it shall be a goal of the city of Banning to close the Banning Municipal Airport as soon as legally permitted." The city continues to support the airport's closure and the property's redevelopment.

In addition to unlocking economic development opportunities for the City of Banning, the closure of the airport would benefit the Morongo Band of Mission Indians by removing easements on lands held in trust adjacent to the airport.

As the Committee considers FAA reauthorization legislation this year, I ask that you include language that would release the Banning Municipal Airport from its Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) obligations, allowing the city to repurpose the land. My Banning Airport Redevelopment Act (H.R.7729, 116th Congress) would accomplish this goal and free up more than 150 acres of land ideally situated for development of logistics, e-commerce, and light manufacturing industries.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony, and I hope the Committee will include this important request in the FAA reauthorization bill.